ISSN: 2995-3286

Research Article

International Journal of Media and Networks

"The Medium is the Murder": Discourse, Power, and the Contested Reality of Violence on Palestinian-Arab Social Media in Israel

Nissim Katz*

Lecturer at Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee, Israel

***Corresponding Author**
Nissim Katz, Lecturer at Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee, Israel.

Submitted: 2026, Feb 16; **Accepted:** 2026, Mar 20; **Published:** 2026, Mar 23

Citation: Katz, N. (2026). "The Medium is the Murder": Discourse, Power, and the Contested Reality of Violence on Palestinian-Arab Social Media in Israel. *Int J Med Net, 4*(1), 01-08.

Abstract

This article conducts a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of how the crisis of internal violence within Israel's Palestinian-Arab minority is represented and contested on TikTok and Instagram. Situated within a context of perceived state neglect and rising crime, these platforms have emerged as a primary 'counter-public' sphere where the crisis is discursively negotiated. Through a detailed analysis of viral videos, the study identifies three contradictory discursive formations: performances of 'affective testimony' framing violence as a political consequence of state abandonment; the aestheticization of a criminal hyper-masculinity constructing a defiant subaltern social order; and the discursive policing of internal patriarchal boundaries. The article contends these platforms are active sites in a Gramscian 'war of position'. Digital discourses function as a double-edged sword: simultaneously a counter-hegemonic critique of the state and a vehicle for reproducing internal power hierarchies, revealing the complex role of digital media in subaltern communities.

Keywords: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Media, TikTok, Political Violence, Counter-publics, Palestinian Minority in Israel, Hegemony, State Neglect, Foucault, Affect Theory

1. Introduction

The Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel, a national, indigenous minority comprising approximately 21% of the state's citizenry, is engulfed in a social catastrophe. Since the year 2000, and accelerating dramatically in the last five years, communities have been ravaged by a wave of internal violence, organised crime, and homicide that has shattered the social fabric and eviscerated any basic sense of personal security [1]. The statistics are stark and paint a picture of a society in extremis. In 2023, over 244 Arab citizens were murdered, more than double the number from the previous year. For comparison, the homicide rate in Arab society is more than eight times higher than in Jewish society [2]. This is not random crime; it is largely a product of feuding organised crime families, protection rackets, and the widespread proliferation of illegal firearms, with an estimated 400,000 illegal weapons circulating in the community [3].

While Israeli state officials and mainstream media often frame this as a culturally intrinsic problem of "Arab criminality," this narrative is vehemently rejected by the community itself. A broad consensus among Palestinian-Arab leaders, academics, and citizens posits the crisis as a direct and predictable outcome of decades of state policy: systemic discrimination, political marginalisation, economic deprivation, and, most critically, the deliberate and sustained neglect by Israeli law enforcement agencies [4,5]. The police are perceived not as protectors but as an indifferent, and at times hostile, arm of a state primarily concerned with the community's political containment rather than its civil welfare [6].

In the vortex of this state-sanctioned lawlessness, a parallel reality has crystallised online. Social media platforms, particularly the visually-driven, algorithmically-charged, and youth-dominated spaces of TikTok and Instagram, have become a crucial public sphere. These are no longer mere platforms for socialisation; they are a primary arena for documenting, processing, debating, and contesting the violence that defines daily existence. Videos of murder scenes filmed moments after the event, defiant displays of automatic weapons set to gangster-rap soundtracks, threats issued between rival families, and the raw, unmediated expressions of grief go viral, accumulating millions of views and creating a shared, if traumatic, digital commons.

While the sociology of this crisis is increasingly well-documented, there has been little critical analysis of the *discursive* nature of

these online representations [7]. This article seeks to fill this lacuna by asking: How is the crisis of violence in Palestinian-Arab society in Israel discursively constructed, performed, and contested on TikTok and Instagram? It moves beyond a simple cataloguing of content to investigate the ideological work these short, visceral videos perform. What narratives do they build? Whose power do they legitimise or challenge? How do they shape the identities and subjectivities of those who produce and consume them?

Drawing on a robust framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (M-CDA), this study argues that these digital artefacts are complex communicative acts engaged in a discursive struggle over the very definition of the crisis. This article's unique contribution lies in its multi-layered approach, bridging a macro-political analysis of state structure with a micro-semiotic investigation of digital texts to reveal a complex "double-edged sword" effect. On one hand, these online discourses serve as a potent form of counter-hegemonic protest against state neglect, making a silenced crisis hyper-visible and articulating a distinctly political grievance. On the other, they often reproduce, aestheticise, and glorify the very hyper-masculine, patriarchal, and violent norms that sustain the crisis from within. This study, therefore, positions these platforms as critical sites of social and political struggle, where the Palestinian-Arab community in Israel grapples with the intertwined demons of external state oppression and internal social decay. The article will proceed by first outlining its comprehensive theoretical framework, followed by a detailed methodological account, an in-depth analysis of the discursive themes, and a concluding discussion of the findings' implications.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 A Multi-Layered Approach to Digital Discourse and Power

To adequately analyse the complex phenomena at hand—the digital representation of violence within a marginalised community—a multi-layered theoretical framework is required. Such a framework must be capable of connecting the macro-political structures that create the conditions for violence, the mid-level discursive strategies through which this violence is given meaning, and the micro-level semiotic choices within digital texts that enact these strategies. This section details a framework integrating theories of state-minority relations, Gramscian and Foucauldian theories of power and discourse, theories of digital counter-publics and affect, and the analytical toolkit of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis.

2.2 The Macro-Political Context: Ethnic Democracy, Control, and the Sovereign 2.2.1 Vacuum

The discourses of violence circulating on Palestinian-Arab social media are unintelligible without first understanding the structural position of this community within the Israeli state. Israel is best conceptualised as an 'ethnic democracy', a political system that combines democratic procedures with the institutionalised dominance of one ethnic group (in this case, Jewish citizens) over others [8]. This structure creates a fundamental and enduring hierarchy, positioning Palestinian citizens as a national, indigenous minority that is simultaneously citizen and 'other'—a perpetual security concern whose collective rights are subordinated to the state's Jewish character [9].

This relationship has been described by scholars as one of 'control' or 'internal colonialism', characterised by policies of land expropriation, economic dependency, and political marginalisation [10,11]. A key manifestation of this control paradigm is the differential application of state sovereignty. Drawing on Agamben's (1998) concept of the 'state of exception', we can argue that Palestinian-Arab communities exist in a peculiar juridical zone [12]. While the Israeli state exerts intense and often coercive security control over the minority in matters deemed to threaten the Jewish state (e.g., political organising, land disputes), it simultaneously engages in a form of 'sovereign withdrawal' when it comes to providing civil security and effective policing within these same communities [6].

This selective neglect or sovereign vacuum is not accidental; it is a structural outcome of perceiving the community primarily through a security lens. The police force, seen as an arm of the state, is widely mistrusted and viewed as an external, often hostile, entity whose primary mission is containment, not protection [13]. This has created a profound power vacuum where the state's legitimate monopoly on violence is absent. Into this void, alternative, non-state actors—namely, organised crime families—have emerged. They provide a perverse form of social order, offering 'protection', mediating disputes, and dispensing a brutal 'justice' predicated entirely on force. The online discourses, therefore, are produced within this complex field: they are at once a reaction against the delegitimised state, a negotiation with the rising power of these subaltern criminal forces, and a reflection of the social anomie that this vacuum engenders.

2.3 The Mid-Level Framework: Discourse, Power, Affect, and the Digital Public 2.3.1 Sphere

To bridge the gap between this macro-political context and the specific communicative acts on social media, we turn to a suite of critical theories concerning discourse, power, and media. This framework operationalizes Gramsci's macro-level 'war of position' through a Foucauldian analysis of subject-formation, situated within the affective counter-publics described by Fraser and Papacharissi.

• Gramscian Hegemony and the Digital War of Position

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony provides a powerful lens for understanding the ideological struggle at play [14]. Hegemony refers to the process by which a dominant class or group maintains its rule not merely through force (domination) but by winning the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups to its moral, political, and cultural values, making its worldview appear as natural 'common sense'. The hegemonic discourse of the Israeli state and its supportive media apparatus consistently frames the violence in Arab society as a cultural failing, a product of an inherently violent or 'primitive' culture. This narrative conveniently absolves the state of responsibility. The online discourses analysed here represent a direct challenge to

this hegemonic narrative. They are exemplary instances of what Gramsci termed a 'war of position': a protracted struggle fought on the cultural and ideological terrain of civil society to build a counter-hegemony. In this war, intellectuals and activists from the subaltern group work to dismantle the dominant 'common sense' and construct an alternative worldview that serves their interests. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have become primary battlegrounds for this war of position. They provide the infrastructure for a counter-hegemonic project that seeks to replace the 'cultural deficit' narrative with a 'state responsibility' narrative.

• Foucauldian Discourse, Power/Knowledge, and Subjectivity

While Gramsci helps us understand the struggle between large-scale ideological blocs, Michel Foucault's work allows for a more granular analysis of how discourse itself operates to produce power and subjects. For Foucault (1980), discourse is not simply a collection of words; it is a regulated system of statements, practices, and institutions that constitutes 'regimes of truth' [15]. These regimes define what is considered true or false, sane or insane, normal or deviant within a given society at a given time. Discourse is inseparable from power; it is through discourse that power is exercised and knowledge is produced (power/knowledge). Crucially, power in the Foucauldian sense is not only repressive (a top-down force that says 'no') but also productive. It produces realities, objects of knowledge, and, most importantly, subjectivities. Discourses provide the scripts, categories, and models through which individuals come to understand themselves and their place in the world. Applying this to our context, the various discourses on TikTok do not just represent violence; they produce it by creating and circulating subject positions. The discourse of state neglect produces the subject position of the 'political victim' or the 'citizen protestor'. The discourse of criminal bravado produces the subject position of the 'thug' or the 'rebel', a hyper-masculine identity that offers a powerful, if destructive, sense of agency. Analysing these discourses allows us to see how subjectivities are being forged in the crucible of this crisis.

• Digital Counter-Publics and Affect Theory

The virtual space where this discursive struggle unfolds can be understood through the lens of 'subaltern counter-publics' (Fraser, 1990) [16]. Critiquing Jürgen Habermas's ideal of a single, universal public sphere, Fraser argued that marginalised groups form "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" [16]. Social media, with its low barrier to entry and networked architecture, has supercharged the formation of such counter-publics. The Palestinian-Arab digital sphere on TikTok and Instagram functions precisely as such an arena—a space for internal deliberation and external opposition, operating largely outside the control of the dominant Hebrew-language media. However, to fully grasp the dynamics of these digital spaces, we must also incorporate insights from affect theory. As scholars like Zizi Papacharissi (2015) and Sara Ahmed (2004) have argued, online political engagement is often driven less by rational debate and more by the circulation of intense emotion, or 'affect' [17,18]. Affects like grief, rage, fear, pride, and shame are not just individual feelings; they are social and political forces that bind people together and motivate action. The virality of the videos analysed here is a testament to their affective power. They are designed to provoke an immediate, visceral response. The shaky-cam footage of a grieving mother is not an argument; it is an affective charge designed to transmit the feeling of loss and injustice directly to the viewer. Understanding these platforms as 'affective publics' helps explain why certain content travels so rapidly and has such a powerful impact, shaping a 'structure of feeling' around the crisis [19].

The Micro-Analytic Toolkit: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (M-CDA)

To operationalise this rich theoretical framework at the level of the individual video, we employ the precise analytical tools of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (M-CDA). M-CDA extends the core tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—which systematically explores the relationship between language, power, and ideology—to account for the full orchestration of semiotic resources in contemporary communication [20-23]. A TikTok video is a dense, layered text where meaning is co-constructed through an interplay of moving images, sound, and written language. A purely linguistic analysis would be wholly inadequate. Our analysis will therefore systematically investigate:

• Visual Semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)

We will deconstruct the 'grammar' of the visual design to uncover its ideological work [22].

o Representational Meaning: This examines how the video represents the world. Are participants shown in action (narrative processes), such as shooting a gun or crying, which tells a story? Or are they presented in a static, definitional way (conceptual processes), such as a young man posing with his weapon, which defines his identity?

o Interactive Meaning: This explores how the video constructs a relationship with the viewer. The camera angle is crucial (a low angle looking up at a subject confers power and authority, while a high angle can diminish them). Social distance (close-up, medium shot, long shot) creates different levels of intimacy, threat, or detachment. The gaze of a participant looking directly at the camera creates a powerful, demanding relationship with the viewer.

o Compositional Meaning: This concerns the arrangement of elements within the frame. Salience (what is made to draw the viewer's eye first, through focus, colour, or size), framing (what is included or excluded from the shot), and information value (the symbolic placement of elements, e.g., left=given/familiar, right=new/problematic) all contribute to the overall message.

• Aural Semiotics (van Leeuwen, 1999)

We will analyse the critical role of sound in shaping interpretation [24].

o Music: The choice of genre (e.g., aggressive drill-rap, mournful religious chants, dramatic orchestral strings) and the specific lyrics provide a powerful interpretive frame for the visual content, telling

the viewer how to feel about what they are seeing.
o Sound Effects and Ambient Sound: The raw, indexical sound of gunshots, police sirens, or human screams creates a sense of verisimilitude and affective intensity, grounding the video in a visceral reality.
o Prosody: The acoustic qualities of any speech—tone, pitch, volume, rhythm (e.g., the frantic shouting of a warning, the sobbing of a mourner, the cold, menacing tone of a threat)—are crucial meaning-making resources.

By integrating these three theoretical layers—the macro-political context of the sovereign vacuum, the mid-level discursive struggle for hegemony within an affective counter-public, and the micro-analytic tools of M-CDA—we can conduct a nuanced, robust, and theoretically grounded investigation into how the crisis of violence is being discursively fought out on the screens of Palestinian-Arab youth in Israel.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (M-CDA). The research is not designed to quantify the prevalence of violent content, which is an epidemiological task, but to conduct a deep, contextualised analysis of how representative examples of such content generate meaning and perform social and political action. The aim is analytical depth and theoretical insight, not statistical generalisability.

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive sample of ten videos was collected from the social media platforms TikTok and Instagram between May and June 2024. This period was selected due to a significant spike in homicides, which led to a high volume of related online content. The videos were identified through a process of "digital ethnography" and "snowball" viewing. This process involved immersive observation, beginning with the monitoring of prominent Arab-Israeli news aggregator accounts (e.g., Kulalarab, Al-Masdar) and community-specific hashtags (e.g., #عنف_المجتمع_العربي - 'violence_in_Arab_society'). From there, the algorithmic recommendations and user-generated content connected to these initial posts were followed, tracking the circulation of content across interconnected accounts and analyzing user engagement to identify trending and resonant videos.
The criteria for inclusion were fourfold:
1. Thematic Relevance: The content had to explicitly depict, reference, or discursively engage with physical, verbal, or symbolic violence within the Palestinian-Arab community in Israel.
2. Origin: The video must have been created by, or prominently feature, members of this community, ensuring it represents an internal discourse.
3. Virality and Resonance: The video had to have achieved significant organic reach (indicated by a high number of views, likes, comments, and shares), suggesting it struck a chord and circulated widely within the target community's digital sphere.
4. Discursive Variety: The sample was selected to collectively represent a range of violent acts and, crucially, a variety of discursive frames (e.g., citizen-journalist documentation of crime scenes, performative displays of weaponry, verbal threats, social commentary, and police-generated content).

3.2 Analytical Procedure

Each of the ten videos was treated as a complete 'multimodal text' and subjected to a systematic, multi-layered analysis. The analytical process for each video involved the following steps:
1. Transcription and Translation: All spoken Arabic (including lyrics in soundtracks) was meticulously transcribed and translated into English by bilingual members of the research team. This process required careful attention to dialectal nuances and culturally specific idioms to preserve not only the literal meaning but also the connotative and affective force of the original language.
2. Multimodal Annotation: A detailed annotation sheet was created for each video, breaking it down into its constituent semiotic modes based on the framework outlined above [22,24]. This involved noting:
o Linguistic/Textual: Key lexical choices, speech acts (e.g., lamenting, threatening), and the content of on-screen text.
o Visual: Shot-by-shot analysis of camera angles, distance, movement, framing, colour grading, editing techniques (e.g., slow-motion, cuts), and the symbolic meaning of depicted objects and people.
o Aural: Identification of the soundtrack genre and lyrics, ambient sounds (sirens, yelling), sound effects, and the prosodic features of any speech.
3. Discursive Interpretation: The annotated data was then interpreted to identify the dominant discursive strategies at play. This involved asking critical questions: What version of reality is being constructed here? What social actors are represented, and how? What identities are being performed or offered to the viewer? What are the ideological effects of the specific combination of modes?
4. Thematic Synthesis: Finally, the interpretations from the individual video analyses were synthesised to identify the overarching discursive themes that cut across the dataset. This iterative process allowed for the emergence of the three core themes presented in the findings section.

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

This research handles sensitive and potentially traumatic content. Ethical considerations were paramount. All usernames and identifiable faces of private individuals in the videos have been anonymised in the analysis to protect their privacy and safety, except where the individuals are public figures or have already been widely identified in mainstream news sources. The study acknowledges the risk of re-circulating traumatic imagery; hence, the analysis focuses on describing the discursive techniques rather than gratuitously reproducing the most graphic elements. The researchers, being embedded within or closely connected to the community being studied, approach this topic with a 'dual consciousness': a commitment to rigorous academic critique combined with a profound sense of responsibility and concern for the community's well-being. This positionality affords a nuanced understanding of the cultural context but also necessitates constant

critical self-reflection to mitigate potential biases.

4. Findings

4.1 The Discursive Constructions of Violence

The in-depth multimodal analysis of the ten videos revealed three powerful, overarching, and often intersecting discursive formations that characterise the representation of violence on these platforms. These are not merely different topics, but different ways of making sense of the crisis, each with its own ideological underpinnings and social effects.

Theme 1: Affective Testimony and the Discourse of State Abandonment

A significant portion of the viral content functions as a form of citizen journalism that is deeply personal, affective, and political. These videos document the immediate aftermath of violence, but their primary discursive function is not objective reporting; it is to perform raw grief and, through that performance, to articulate a powerful indictment of the state.

Video 2, documenting the aftermath of a double homicide in the coastal town of Jisr al-Zarqa, is a paradigmatic case. The 27-second clip is filmed on a smartphone, and its shaky, handheld aesthetic creates a powerful sense of verisimilitude and urgency—this is happening now. The video's protagonist is the victims' sister, and the multimodal construction of her testimony is crucial.

• Aural and Linguistic Construction

The video opens with her raw, high-pitched scream, an acoustic signifier of pure anguish that immediately engages the viewer's affective response. Her words are a lament: "My children, my children are dead! Today my two brothers were murdered, why? Why did they do this to us?!" This initial utterance frames the event as a personal, familial tragedy. However, she executes a pivotal discursive shift. Panning her camera towards a group of police officers, her tone shifts from grief to rage as she declares: "And the government is just standing there!" This sentence re-frames the entire event. The murder is no longer just a criminal act between individuals; it is a political event, a consequence of governmental inaction.

• Visual Construction

The visual semiotics powerfully reinforce this message. The police officers are depicted from a distance, static and passive. They are compositionally placed in the background, visually coded as part of the inert scenery rather than as active agents of justice. The camera then focuses on the victims' car, its roof covered by a white sheet—a stark, minimalist symbol of death—while the wailing of the mother is heard off-screen. This combination of visuals and sounds constructs a stark dichotomy: the passionate, chaotic grief of the community versus the cold, bureaucratic indifference of the state.

Through this multimodal orchestration, the video transforms a private tragedy into a public, political testimony. It functions as a counter-hegemonic act, seizing the narrative from the police report or the mainstream news clip and reframing it through the lens of state abandonment. This is an 'affective public' in action, where shared grief becomes the basis for a collective political claim.

Theme 2: The Aesthetics of Power: Performing Criminal Hyper-Masculinity

In stark contrast to the discourse of victimhood is a powerful and seductive counter-discourse that normalises, aestheticises, and even glorifies illegal weapons and the performance of a defiant, criminal masculinity. These videos construct an alternative social order where status, respect, and power are derived not from civic or economic capital, but from the demonstrated capacity for violence. This is a discourse that fills the power vacuum left by the state.
Video 10 offers a potent example. The video features a young man lip-syncing to an aggressive Arabic drill-rap song while making threatening gestures.

• Aural-Linguistic Dominance

The soundtrack is the primary meaning-maker. The lyrics are an explicit script of violent bravado: "At the time of the incident, we all gather / The enemy will drown in blood / Whoever messes with us will die / We have no mercy on anyone, only God has mercy." This is a ready-made narrative of tribal-like solidarity, lethal retribution, and divine-level authority. The use of a popular, high-production-value song lends a 'cool', professionalised aesthetic to the threats.

• Visual Reinforcement

The young man's performance translates the lyrics into embodied action. His hand gestures mimic holding and firing a gun. His facial expression is one of aggressive intensity. He performs for the camera, directly addressing the viewer through his gaze. In the Foucauldian sense, he is not just imitating a song; he is actively producing himself as a particular kind of subject—the fearless, merciless enforcer. He is inhabiting a subject position made available and attractive by this discourse.

Video 6, showing a drive-by shooting, takes this aestheticisation to another level. The video is filmed from the passenger seat of the moving car, placing the viewer in the position of the accomplice.

• Cinematic Construction

The visuals are framed like a scene from a gangster film or a first-person-shooter video game. The darkness is punctuated by the rhythmic muzzle flashes from the automatic weapon. The editing is clean, focusing solely on the act of shooting, with no depiction of the victims or consequences. This decontextualisation turns the act of violence into a pure spectacle of power. It is aesthetically 'clean' and thrilling, stripped of its human cost. The camera angle, low and inside the vehicle, aligns the viewer with the aggressor, creating a sense of vicarious power.

These videos perform crucial ideological work. They normalise the presence of weapons, making them seem like natural accessories of young masculinity. They provide a powerful script of identity for alienated young men for whom licit paths to status and respect

may seem blocked. This discourse directly competes with the discourse of victimhood, offering a narrative not of helplessness but of defiant, albeit criminal, agency.

Theme 3: The Discursive Policing of Internal Boundaries

The final theme reveals how discourses of violence are turned inward, used to police social, patriarchal, and sexual boundaries within the community itself. Here, aggression serves to reinforce traditional hierarchies and punish perceived transgressions, demonstrating how a counter-hegemonic struggle against the state can coexist with the reproduction of oppressive power relations internally.

Video 9, centred on a mundane parking dispute, is a masterclass in the use of verbal violence to assert social status. The narrator, whose face is unseen, films a car parked improperly next to his own.

• Linguistic Degradation

His monologue is a torrent of targeted insults designed to humiliate and establish a hierarchy. He repeatedly uses the pejorative "ya khanzeer" ("you pig"), a deeply insulting term in Arabic culture. His aggression is explicitly linked to material status symbols: "Why, you scoundrel, do you park next to my Range Rover?" By invoking the brand name, he frames the parking violation not as an inconvenience but as an affront to his social standing. The verbal violence is a tool for re-asserting a social hierarchy based on wealth and masculine honour.

Video 1, pushing this boundary-policing into the realm of gender and sexuality with chilling effect, features a Palestinian transgender woman being verbally assaulted by an unseen man.

• The Disciplinary Gaze

The video is constructed as an interrogation. The woman is visually presented as an object of scrutiny: she is seated, wearing revealing clothing, and the camera seems to focus on her surgically-enhanced features. The man's voice, disembodied and controlling, directs the interaction.

• Sexualised Verbal Violence

His language is sexually explicit and degrading. He makes a crude comment—"Doesn't your 'thing' tickle you? I'm sure it's tickling and making noises"—which functions to grotesquely sexualise and simultaneously invalidate her gender identity. His words are a form of symbolic violence, aimed at putting her back in her 'place' as a deviant other who exists outside the community's rigid patriarchal and heteronormative boundaries. The act of recording and presumably sharing this interaction transforms it from a private assault into a public shaming ritual. It serves as a disciplinary warning to others who might transgress these norms.

These videos demonstrate that the "enemy" is not always the state. The same discursive tools of aggression and intimidation are deployed internally to maintain a patriarchal order. This highlights the complex, and often contradictory, nature of power within a subaltern community, where resistance to external oppression can coincide with the enforcement of internal oppression.

5. Discussion

The analysis of these multimodal texts reveals a complex and deeply fractured digital public sphere. TikTok and Instagram have become a central ideological battlespace where the meaning of the violence crisis in Palestinian-Arab society is forged. This is a space of intense discursive struggle, reflecting a community caught between the structural violence of the state and the spectacular violence erupting from within. The findings invite a deeper discussion of three key areas: the dynamics of the digital counter-public, the production of violent subjectivities, and the paradoxical nature of subaltern resistance.

Our analysis confirms that the Palestinian-Arab digital sphere functions as a vibrant subaltern counter-public [16]. It provides a critical space for the community to develop and circulate a counter-narrative to the hegemonic discourse of the Israeli state. The videos of 'affective testimony' (Theme 1) are a powerful example of this. They represent a form of 'symbolic resistance' or what could be termed 'discursive insurgency' [25]. By seizing the means of representation, ordinary citizens challenge the state's monopoly on defining reality. They refuse the official narrative that frames their dead as mere crime statistics and instead re-inscribe them as political victims of state neglect. This act of public mourning is profoundly political; it is a collective performance of grievance that builds solidarity and mobilizes a shared political identity rooted in the experience of abandonment.

However, the findings also reveal the profound pathologies of this same digital space. It is not the idealized rational-critical sphere of Habermas, but a volatile 'affective public' where outrage and spectacle often drown out deliberation [17]. The very platforms that enable counter-hegemonic protest also facilitate the spread of destructive internal discourses. The algorithmic architecture of TikTok and Instagram, which prioritizes high-arousal content, creates a structural bias towards the sensational. The very design of these platforms—privileging brevity, emotional intensity, and rapid, decontextualized circulation—structurally favors the pathologies of spectacular violence over the slower, more nuanced work of counter-hegemonic deliberation. A video of a drive-by shooting (Theme 2) is more likely to be algorithmically amplified than a nuanced discussion about community organizing. This creates a dangerous feedback loop: the platform rewards spectacular violence, which in turn encourages the production of more such content, contributing to the normalization and even aestheticisation of criminality.

Therefore, this digital counter-public is a double-edged sword. It is a space of empowerment where a silenced community finds its voice, but it is also a space where the community's own internal demons are given a powerful stage. It simultaneously hosts a Gramscian 'war of position' against the state and a Hobbesian war of all against all within the community. The struggle for a just social order is constantly undermined by the allure of a lawless

one, and the platforms themselves seem structurally unable to distinguish between the two.

The discourses circulating on these platforms are not just reflecting a pre-existing reality; they are actively producing it by shaping the subjectivities of those who engage with them. A Foucauldian lens is particularly illuminating here. The videos provide powerful 'technologies of the self', offering models for how to be a man, how to command respect, and how to navigate a world defined by violence [26].

The discourse of criminal hyper-masculinity (Theme 2) is a prime example of Foucault's concept of productive power. It doesn't just repress; it produces a particular kind of subject. For a young, unemployed man living in a marginalised town with few prospects for advancement through licit means, this discourse offers a compelling identity. It provides a script for performing power, a set of aesthetic codes (the music, the clothing, the weaponry), and a moral logic (defiance of a hostile state, loyalty to the clan). By imitating the performances seen on TikTok, he is not just pretending; he is actively constituting himself as a powerful subject within this alternative social order. This is a form of 'subjugated knowledge' rising up, but one that ultimately reinforces a cycle of self-destruction.

Similarly, the discourse of internal policing (Theme 3) works to produce and regulate subjects. The verbal assault on the transgender woman is a disciplinary act aimed at enforcing a rigid patriarchal and heteronormative subjectivity. It publicly marks her as 'deviant' and, in doing so, reinforces the 'normalcy' of the aggressor and those who align with him. It is a powerful demonstration of how discourse works to create and maintain social hierarchies by defining the boundaries of acceptable personhood. These videos are, in effect, public lessons in subjectivity, teaching viewers who belongs, who does not, and what consequences await those who transgress.

The most complex and troubling implication of this study lies in the paradoxical nature of the resistance it documents. The analysis reveals a community engaged in a legitimate struggle against state oppression while simultaneously reproducing deeply oppressive power structures within its own ranks. The same young man who might share a video condemning police inaction (an anti-state act) might also share a video glorifying violence against a rival family or a woman who has violated an honor code (a patriarchal act).

This phenomenon, where resistance to external domination coexists with the reinforcement of internal domination, is a well-documented paradox in postcolonial and subaltern studies [27,28]. Frantz Fanon (1963), in The Wretched of the Earth, presciently described how the violence of the coloniser can be turned inward, with the oppressed replicating colonial structures of violence amongst themselves [29]. In this context, the hyper-masculinity and patriarchal control seen in Themes 2 and 3 can be interpreted as a distorted form of agency—a desperate attempt to exercise power in the only domains left available when political and economic power are denied. Masculinity becomes a key site for reclaiming a sense of honour and control in the face of emasculating state policies.

However, understanding this dynamic does not mean condoning it. The key insight is that the struggle against state violence and the struggle against internal, patriarchal violence are not separate; they are inextricably linked. A counter-hegemonic project that only focuses on the state while ignoring the 'internal colonialisms' of patriarchy and criminal coercion is doomed to fail. It risks replacing one form of domination with another. The digital sphere makes this contradiction starkly visible. It lays bare the fault lines within the community's struggle, showing how the desire for liberation can become entangled with the desire for domination. Any truly emancipatory project must therefore be a dual one, fighting for justice from the state while simultaneously fighting for a more just and less violent social order from within.

6. Conclusions

This article has ventured into the turbulent digital heart of the violence crisis plaguing Palestinian-Arab society in Israel. Through a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of viral TikTok and Instagram videos, it has demonstrated that these platforms are not a mere sideshow to the crisis; they are a central arena where its meaning is constructed, its logics are disseminated, and its futures are contested. This is a space of profound discursive struggle, where competing realities clash in a chaotic, algorithmically-mediated war of position.

On one hand, these platforms have undeniably empowered a marginalised community. They have facilitated the creation of a vibrant counter-public, a space where the silenced can bear witness, where personal grief can be transfigured into collective political protest, and where the hegemonic narrative of the state can be powerfully and effectively challenged. The digital circulation of affective testimony has made the community's suffering impossible for the wider world to ignore, representing a significant act of discursive insurgency.

On the other hand, this study has illuminated the deep pathologies of this same digital sphere. It has shown how the very platforms that enable resistance also provide a fertile breeding ground for the normalisation, aestheticisation, and glorification of the very violence that is tearing the community apart. They host a seductive discourse of criminal hyper-masculinity that offers a destructive script of identity for alienated youth. Furthermore, they serve as a stage for the brutal enforcement of internal patriarchal hierarchies, revealing the painful paradox where a struggle against external oppression can coexist with the exercise of internal domination.

The contribution of this study is threefold. Empirically, it provides a textured, in-depth analysis of the digital dimension of a pressing social and political crisis, moving beyond statistics to explore the complex and contradictory meanings being forged in the heat of the moment. Theoretically, it demonstrates the potent utility of an integrated M-CDA framework—one that connects macro-political structures, mid-level discursive theories, and micro-level semiotic

analysis—for understanding the intricate workings of power and ideology in the digital age. Methodologically, it showcases how a deep, qualitative analysis of a small but significant sample of digital artefacts can yield profound insights that large-scale quantitative studies might miss.

The limitations of this study, primarily its small, purposively chosen sample and its focus on a single snapshot in time, mean that its findings should be seen as illustrative and interpretive rather than exhaustive. Urgent future research is needed. Large-scale, mixed-methods studies could map the prevalence and circulation of these competing discourses. Longitudinal digital ethnographies could provide invaluable insight into how individual and group identities are shaped by prolonged engagement with this content.

Nevertheless, this study concludes with a critical and urgent argument: any meaningful intervention into this crisis, whether from within the community or from the state, must contend not only with the weapons on the streets but also with the powerful and contradictory discourses that give them meaning on the screen. Addressing this crisis requires more than just better policing and more social programs, vital as they are. It requires the cultivation of a critical digital media literacy capable of deconstructing the seductive allure of violent performances. It requires a dual political project that fights for justice from the state while simultaneously challenging the internal hegemonies of patriarchy and criminal coercion. The war for the future of Palestinian-Arab society in Israel is being fought not just in its alleys and town squares, but in the 15-second, endlessly looping videos that flash across the screens of its children, each one a potential lesson in either protest or pathology.

References

1. Haddad-Haj-Yahya, N., Khlaileh, M., & Rudnitzky, A. (2021). *Yearbook of Arab society in Israel*. The Israel Democracy Institute.
2. Abraham Initiatives. (2024). *Crime and violence in the Arab society: Periodical updates*. Retrieved July 1, 2024.
3. State Comptroller of Israel. (2019). *Special report: Dealing with the phenomenon of shooting incidents and illegal weapons in Arab society and in mixed cities.* Office of the State Comptroller.
4. Ghanem, A. (2018). *The internet in Arab society in Israel: A preliminary picture and policy recommendations*. Israel Internet Association (ISOC-IL).
5. Madad al-Carmel – Arab Center for Applied Social Research. (2019). Survey on violence in Palestinian society 2018. Madad al-Carmel.
6. Jabareen, Y. T. (2022). Policing the 'enemy within': The case of the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel. Punishment & Society, 24(5), 756–776.
7. Yachimovich-Cohen, N. (2020). Data on crime in Arab society–update.
8. Smooha, S. (2002). The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. *Nations and nationalism, 8*(4), 475-503.
9. Rouhana, N. N., & Ghanayim, A. (2018). The settler-colonial paradigm in the context of the Palestinian citizens in Israel. In N. N. Rouhana & A. Sabbagh-Khoury (Eds.), The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in history, politics, and society (pp. 23–56). Mada al-Carmel.
10. Kimmerling, B. (1983). Zionism and territory: The socio-territorial dimensions of Zionist politics. University of California, Institute of International Studies.
11. Zureik, E. (1979). The Palestinians in Israel: A study in internal colonialism. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
12. Agamben, G., & Sacer, H. (1998). Sovereign power and bare life. Homo sacer, 1.
13. Haddad-Haj-Yahya, N. (2020). Organized crime in Arab society. The Israel Democracy Institute Policy Paper. IDI Press.
14. Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the prison notebooks. International Publishers.
15. Foucault, M. (1980). Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977. Pantheon Books.
16. Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56–80.
17. Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press.
18. Ahmed, S. (2004). The cultural politics of emotion. Edinburgh University Press.
19. Williams, R. (1977). Marxism and literature Oxford University Press. New York.
20. Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.
21. van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Discourse and power. Palgrave Macmillan.
22. Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). Reading images: The grammar of visual design (2nd ed.). Routledge.
23. Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction. SAGE.
24. van Leeuwen, T. (1999). Speech, music, sound. Macmillan.
25. Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. yale university Press.
26. Foucault, M., Martin, L. H., Gutman, H., & Hutton, P. H. (1988). Technologies of the self. *London: Tavistock.*
27. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), Marxism and the interpretation of culture (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
28. Chatterjee, P. (1993). The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories. Princeton University Press.
29. Fanon, F., Sartre, J. P., & Farrington, C. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (Vol. 36, pp. 3-317). New York: Grove press.
30. Fuchs, C. (2014). Social media: A critical introduction. SAGE.

Copyright: *©2026 Nissim Katz. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.*